

ANDERSON UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT
Remarks by Administrator Charles Bolden
May 2, 2015

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

To President Whitaker; to the faculty and staff; to all the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, children, grandchildren, and friends who are with us ... it's an honor to share this very special day with all of you.

To the Class of 2015 – this is my favorite part – congratulations! You did it!

After many long days and nights of studying, cramming and maybe a little partying, today you will walk out of here with a coveted Anderson University degree. That is a remarkable achievement and a great way to launch a new beginning. It's also a great responsibility.

HELP WANTED

Anderson University has been described as a “*future-directed community*” – and you are graduating in times when our planet's future is in need of direction.

We are at a pivotal moment in human history. Our planet has a very big “help wanted” sign on it – *trust me on this, you can see it from space (not really)* – and we're counting on your generation. We're counting on you to cure the previously incurable ... to tackle big challenges like climate change ... to teach us to live as one people on this beautiful planet (and we need only watch the news these days to see why this is so very important).

These are all great challenges – and if they sound a little intimidating that's because they *are*.

Now, others might prefer to opt out of addressing the big challenges of these times. *You* don't have that luxury. You see, you're about to join a special, “future-directed” community known as “Anderson alumni.”

One of the great things I admire about your community – and I grew up only about two hours from here in Columbia – is your commitment to “servant leadership.” In 2006, the Anderson Board of Trustees adopted a values statement that spelled out exactly what this means. Quote: “*servant leaders are first and foremost servants. They are affirmative builders of a better society ... Servant leaders have empathy for others and are accepting of diverse people ... They are able to view events and situations from a broad perspective yet also spend time in the trenches.*” End quote.

What a beautiful – and awesome – responsibility.

I'd like to go on record today in saying that I have no doubt that you and your generation are up to the task.

THE SPACE GENERATION

For all the challenges we face, this is a remarkable time to be starting a career.

As a country, we've created 12.1 million new jobs and have experienced 61 consecutive months of job growth. Wages are rising. The deficit is falling. More Americans are buying homes. More businesses are hiring. More manufactures are ordering durable goods – fueled, I might add, by a sizable increase in aircraft orders. We're less dependent on foreign oil than we've been in nearly three decades. Fewer of us have to go without health care or choose between filling prescriptions and filling the gas tank.

In a much broader sense, so much of the things that once were the purview of science fiction are now facts of life: Being able to have a video chat with a loved one half a world away on your phone, laptop or tablet; watching a move that's been beamed down to earth via satellite; posting a high resolution photograph of your adorable little niece or nephew in real-time on your social media site of choice.

I call your generation the “space generation” because of the expansive way you look at our world, our universe and the possibilities they contain.

You live in a world where astronauts from many nations fly together in space every single day and where we're preparing to extend the human presence farther into the solar system. That also used to be the stuff of science fiction.

We're only a few months away from the *New Horizons* spacecraft's arrival in the Pluto system. When that happens the United States will have flown by or visited every single planet and dwarf planet in the solar system.

At the same time, we're only a couple years away from sending the James Webb Space Telescope a million miles into space – which will open the door to finding undiscovered planets and galaxies. Already the Hubble Space Telescope – which at 25 years old and going strong is older than many of you – is giving scientists enough new data and discovery to fill the entire Library of Congress, every single year.

In short, we're moving beyond the limits of our own imagination ... and it's your generation – each and everyone of you in the Class of 2015 sitting here today – that are going to push us there; that are going to prove something President Kennedy said (and I quote) “*No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings.*” (End quote)

I want to invite you to close your eyes for a moment and imagine a future where human beings and robots work together to pioneer Mars and the Solar System. Graduates, you are this future!

You're part of the generation that will travel to an asteroid ... that will walk the face of Mars ... and, yes ... will return home safely. Today, we're further along on our Journey to Mars than ever before in human history and it's your generation that's going to

complete this journey. You're going to land human beings on Mars. Think about that for a moment. The feet in the first boots on the Red Planet could be here with us today.

A child born this year will never have known a time when commercial companies were not regularly carrying cargo to space ... or human beings weren't living and working aboard the International Space Station.

Perhaps your own children and grandchildren will never know a time when human beings haven't been living on Mars.

You might have heard President Obama declare that we're pushing out into the Solar System not just to visit but to stay. This isn't science fiction – it's your generation's future ... and the task of building this future, this better society, is up to you.

SERVICE

As you take your own giant leap into the future, I have a few pieces of advice for you. The first concerns not just where you'll go, but how you'll get there.

Anderson University has been described as *"a community rather than a conglomerate."* I love that.

We like to think of NASA like that as well. I can tell you that as NASA Administrator, my top priority is our people. It's a great source of pride that at the same time we're reaching new heights in space and aeronautics, we're also the #1 rated, best place to work in the federal government three years running. (*And hint, hint, we're hiring!*)

When you're a great place to work, the best and the brightest want to come and work for you and with you. What's more, they tend to want to keep working with you, too.

So the first my piece of advice is to keep in mind that your success is not only about the work you do, but *how* you do it.

TEAMWORK

It's also about with *whom* you work.

Michael Jordan once said that *"talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins championships."*

I'll attest from my firsthand experience that this holds true whether you're leading Marines, flying combat missions, or piloting a mission in space.

None of us wouldn't be here were it not for the shoulders on which we stood. So my second piece of advice is *"don't let a day pass that you don't approach someone who*

means a lot to you and thank them for just being themselves and for helping you be you.”

With this in mind, graduates, I hope you'll join me in showing appreciation for your team – the parents and grandparents who cared for you and got you here; your family members and friends who have stood by you and traveled near and far to be with you today. Join me in a round of applause for them.

In my life, I've been blessed to go to space four times, and to travel to nearly every corner of our planet. Nothing I've seen compares to the awe of looking into the eyes of my children and grandchildren. If you choose to start a family, love and care for them every single day as your loved ones have cared for you.

DON'T LISTEN TO THOSE WHO SAY YOU DON'T BELONG

That brings me to my third piece of advice – it's a lesson my parents taught me and my wife and I try to teach our own kids and grandkids: Be bold, be fearless, dream big, and by all means, don't listen to anyone who tells you can't do something or you don't belong. Don't waste your time trying to explain yourself or your identity to anyone. Don't feel like you have to justify why you are where you are. This applies to the workplace or anywhere else.

In my younger days, my dream was to attend the U.S. Naval Academy and to serve my country – just as my father and my uncles had done in World War II, when African Americans had to fight for the right to serve in our Armed Forces. Growing up during the days of segregation here in the U.S., it was an uphill battle.

When I came of age – as I mentioned, just a couple hours away from here -- no one in my South Carolina congressional delegation would provide an appointment nor nomination to the Academy as was required for admission. So I wrote President Johnson asking for help. I never got a response, but that possibly led to Congressman William Dawson of Illinois providing me the appointment I needed to be accepted. Rep. Dawson was himself a veteran of World War I and only the third African American elected to Congress in the 20th century.

After having to fight just for the opportunity to be admitted, my classmates at the Naval Academy did me the honor of electing me class president. Today, after a 34-year career in the Marine Corps, I have the honor of serving as Administrator of NASA under the nation's first Black President.

Now when I say, “dream big” that doesn't mean you'll always know what the future holds. Growing up, I never conceived that some day I'd become a Marine Corps jet pilot, let alone pilot the space shuttle. When I finally made the decision to apply for the astronaut program, I was 34 years old and serving as a Marine Corps test pilot. Before that I had never even thought about being an astronaut – I figured it was just out of the question.

The man who convinced me that I could become an astronaut grew up just a couple hundred miles from here in Lake City. His name was Ronald – or Ron – McNair.

As an African-American growing up during segregation, he overcame obstacle-after-obstacle. He went on to earn a PhD from MIT, to become a notable physicist, a highly accomplished jazz saxophonist, and a fifth-degree black belt in karate.

He reached heights that most would never have thought possible – and in 1984 he reached even higher, when he became the second African-American to fly into space. That year, he also delivered a beautiful commencement address down the road in Columbia, and I want to share with you something he said.

Quote: *"The road between South Carolina and space flight is not a very simple one, nor one filled with guarantees. In fact, the only guarantees to be found are those that reside in the unchallenged depths of one's own determination."* End quote.

CONCLUSION

I want to leave you with a story. It's about the great American aviator Charles Lindberg.

The year is 1927. Lindberg is flying to Mexico. The weather is foggy and rainy. After flying over the Texas border, Lindberg realizes something. He's completely lost. Unsure of where he's headed, he gets an idea. He'll fly real low and look for a landmark. So he takes his plane down nice and low and as luck would have it, he spots some train tracks. After following the tracks he breathes a sigh of relief. He's found a train station. He figures he'll get low enough to read the sign on the station and check to see where he is on his map.

He spots a sign. It says "Caballeros." He pulls out his trusty map, but sure as the world, he can't find Caballeros anywhere on the map. So he keeps flying. He gets to another station, finds another sign, and wouldn't you know it? It says exactly the same thing. Caballeros. Now at this point you can only imagine how confused he is. Apparently there are two Caballeros in Mexico and neither of them is on his map! He keeps flying until finally he realizes something. Caballeros isn't a place. It's the Spanish word for "Gentleman." The signs he keeps seeing don't refer to the name of a city or town. They mark the entrance to the men's restroom.

This brings me my final piece of advice: don't be afraid to fail. Even the very best get lost sometime and anyone who tells you they know exactly where we are headed, probably isn't being straight with you.

Graduates, while no one can tell you for sure where our world is headed in the years to come, I believe that your generation will take us to a better place. A place worthy of the planet I've been blessed to see from space -- where its serenity and lack of political borders belies the truth of what sometimes happens on the ground.

I fully expect that you will direct us into the better future we hold in our hearts; that you'll affirmatively build a better society.

Congratulations Class of 2015!

Godspeed. God bless you. And God bless America.